

PROJECT SUMMARY

SNC Reference Number
(enter if previously assigned)

SNC 080001

County: Nevada and Sierra

Applicant: The Nature Conservancy

Project Title: Independence Lake

PROJECT GOAL

The purpose of the project is to acquire a large portion of the Independence Creek watershed including Independence Lake. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and its partners will purchase fee title ownership of 2,325 acres of forest land around the Independence Lake and Creek from Sierra Pacific Power Company (SPPC). The land under the lake is a public trust asset. The goal of the project is to protect the pristine lake and creek ecosystem from potential future impacts of development and/or mismanagement.

PROJECT SCOPE

The lands surrounding Independence Lake make it one of the most pristine alpine areas in the northern Sierra Nevada. Formed by glaciers more than 10,000 years ago, the lake is nestled between Mount Lola — an ancient volcano that is the highest peak in the northern Sierra (9,148 feet) — and the volcanic cones of Carpenter Ridge.

Approximately the same size as Donner Lake at two and a half miles long and half a mile wide, with 625 acres of open water, Independence Lake is one of the larger alpine lakes in the Sierra. The lake is surrounded by conifer forest, montane chaparral, aspen groves, and meadows.

Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) funds will be combined with over \$14 million dollars in other private and public funding to purchase the property. The 2,325 acre forest acquisition will protect the full extent of the lake's shoreline and approximately three quarters of a mile of Independence Creek.

The acquisition is the first step in a large restoration and management effort. Independence Lake is a rare fish refuge and the only lake in the Lahontan drainage (the watersheds of the Carson, Humboldt, Truckee, and Walker Rivers) that still has a full complement of native fishes. It is also the only lake in the Sierra Nevada or anywhere in California that supports a wild and self-sustaining population of the federally threatened Lahontan cutthroat trout. TNC is committed to conserving and restoring the native fish and aquatic ecosystem, and is developing restoration and management plans for native fish, forest and recreation. The long-term goal of the fish management plan is to restore the annual adult spawning population of Lahontan cutthroat trout — now averaging about 100 — to 500 to 1,000 spawning adults annually. TNC proposes to achieve this by erecting a fish weir along the spawning stream and removing predatory non-native fish while permitting the natives to pass upstream to spawn. TNC estimates that it may take five to ten years to reach this goal. The objective of the forestry management plan is to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, and subsequent erosion of sediments into the lake and creek, by regular thinning to create old growth conditions. Finally, a recreation management plan is being developed that will permit public access to the property without compromising the ecological integrity of the alpine lake system. TNC estimates that it will need to raise approximately \$10 million dollars to implement these post-

acquisition stewardship and management plans. This sum includes a \$6 million dollar endowment for long-term management of the property.

The acquisition is also part of a larger effort to protect and restore the Truckee River watershed, of which Independence Creek is a tributary. TNC and its partners have protected more than a dozen properties in this watershed in both California and Nevada, including a seven mile stretch of the Truckee River Canyon that was also acquired from SPPC.

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

- Ted Owens, Nevada County Supervisor
- Alex Mas, Executive Director, The Northern Sierra Partnership
- Sandra Morey, Region 2 Manager, CA Dept. of Fish and Game,
- James Kirchner, Director, Central Sierra Field Stations, UC Berkeley
- Gary Scoppettone, Section Chief, US Geological Survey

SNC PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SCHEDULE

DETAILED PROJECT DELIVERABLES	TIMELINE
Deposit additional funds into escrow	April – early May, 2009
Close of escrow	May, 2009
Project close out	By January, 2010
Final report	By January, 2010

SNC PROJECT COSTS

PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES	TOTAL SNC FUNDING
Land acquisition cost	\$1,000,000
SNC GRANT TOTAL	\$1,000,000